

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

## Issue Fact Sheet

### The Issue: Use of dogs and other domestic animals

**Background:** In Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 26 - Public Entry and Use, the use of domestic animals on all National Wildlife Refuges is addressed in 26.21(b): “No unconfined domestic animals, including but not limited to dogs, hogs, cats, horses, sheep, and cattle, shall be permitted to enter upon any national wildlife refuge, or to roam at large upon such an area.”

The regulation currently in use on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is stepped-down from this regulation and modified to address the use of hunting dogs on the refuge: “We prohibit unconfined domestic animals, including dogs and other pets, on the Refuge, except for controlled hunting and retrieving dogs engaged in authorized hunting activities during the hunting season.”

The term “unconfined” is not defined, leading to many interpretations. For some, it means having a dog in a proper heeling position. To others, it means having the animal in sight as it runs loose. Interpretations also vary among enforcement personnel. The discretion of law enforcement personnel has been used in the enforcement of the existing regulation. Many verbal warnings have been issued to pet owners reminding them of the need to keep their dog restrained and the reasons why.

The goal is to develop a regulation that is clearly understood by all concerned and addresses pet restraint on the refuge.

### Main Concerns:

1. Free running dogs on a crowded sandbar, a hiking trail, or other sensitive locations may result in conflicts between visitors, unwanted disturbance, or injury from dog bites.
2. Free running dogs can chase, disturb, or even kill wildlife.
3. The public would like to be able to continue swimming their dogs at landings or from sandbars during the summer months and to allow non-hunting dogs to be off-leash on the refuge from the beginning of hunting season through winter.
4. Free-ranging and urban house cats take a toll on wildlife and trespassing cattle and horses trample vegetation and may disturb refuge visitors.